

Groupwork with Children of Battered Women

A Practitioner's Manual

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As adapted by:
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Group Sessions

This manual provides a detailed description of the entire group program after intake. The group aims to achieve four main goals and their corresponding sub-goals (see Chapter 2). The major goal of breaking the family secret is emphasized in the first five sessions. Ways of protecting oneself are discussed in the sixth, seventh and eighth sessions. Efforts to improve children's self-esteem and to provide them with a positive experience are central to each of the group sessions.

The Group Program

The group program includes an orientation, nine core group sessions and two post group booster sessions. The presentation of each session includes a major theme or message, desired outcomes for the participants, an outline, and facilitator notes and food for thought. Each of these sections is described in the box below.

Sections of a Session Presentation

Group Message. This section describes the general theme of the specific group session. It reflects the larger goals of the program (as stated in Chapter 2) and guides the group activities. One can think about it as the desired answer a child (or a group leader) would give if asked, "What was the group about today?"

Desired Outcomes. This section defines concrete objectives for each session. We encourage group leaders to evaluate the achievement of these objectives for each child after each session (see sample Desired Outcomes Evaluation Form in Appendix B). By performing such evaluation, group leaders can keep track of a child's individual experiences in the group. It also may help increase the group leaders' awareness of concrete accomplishments by the child (see more details below).

Outline. This section is a summary of each session's activities. Many of these activities contain references to the numbered Facilitator Notes for that session.

General Considerations and Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought. These two sections provide further explanation and description of the outlined group activities and expand on the main issues dealt with in the session on the basis of data from the evaluation study we conducted (see Chapter 2). Items in "Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought" are numbered for ease of use.

The recommended group time for each session of the nine outlined is one hour and fifteen minutes for both age groups. Also allow one hour and fifteen minutes for the orientation and for each of the booster sessions.

We strongly recommend that each group be led by two counselors: a leader and an assistant. The presence of two group leaders in the room is required for optimal safety, support, and learning conditions. Male-female co-leading provides opportunities for positive modeling of gender role behavior and male-female interaction and allows both boys and girls to relate to a same-gender and other-gender group leader but is not required. The assistant does not necessarily need to be trained; but must be able to comfort and have some experience with children.

The minimum group size is two children. Groups can still continue if the group size drops below two due to poor attendance. When a group is started with only two children, every effort should be made to find at least one additional child to join the group and every effort should be made to maintain the minimum. The maximum group size is ten children.

OUTCOME EVALUATION

You should evaluate the achievement of the group's desired outcomes for each child after each session. The performance of such evaluation will help you keep track of children's individual accomplishments and experiences of the group. Such information is important for facilitating individual children's achievement of group goals and for an ongoing assessment of the children's needs. It also can serve as an important source of information for assessing needs for further services at the end of the group.

Compare notes on children's outcomes with those of your co-leader and use the evaluation as a basis for team and supervisory discussion of children's individual progress and needs.

Child outcome evaluations can be facilitated by using the evaluation form located in box 4.2. Following are instructions for the use of such forms. These forms should be used only by the group leaders and not shared with the child's parents for the duration of the group.

Instructions. Prepare a set of forms for each child in your group. Familiarize yourself with the desired outcomes prior to the session and pay attention to children's achievement of these outcomes during the session. Fill out the forms as soon after the session as possible, when your memory of the group process is still fresh. Remember that you evaluate individual children, not the group as a whole. Evidence of outcome achievement can be both verbal and nonverbal.

The achievement of some outcomes may be difficult to assess, especially when the outcome concerns a certain feeling state or cognitive change. A sensitivity to the child's individual manifestations of emotional states and cognitive understanding will be helpful. Write down additional observations of the child's experience in the session and other relevant information in the space provided under "General Comments".

Box 4.2: Evidence Categories for Outcome Achievement

Rarely Somewhat Often Frequently

General Indicators:

- ☐ Talks/ does not talk in group
- ☐ Brings things to group: food, toys, animals, etc.

Verbal Indicator:

- ☐ Speech: good tone, inflection, clarity
- ☐ Shares thoughts and feelings related to group activities
- ☐ Shares personal stories
- ☐ Asks questions on group material
- ☐ Aggressive: shouts
- ☐ Abusive: curses, threatens, puts others down, etc.

Behavioral indicators:

- ☐ Sits outside/inside the middle of the circle/activity
- ☐ Sits in an open place
- ☐ Stays in the room
- ☐ Eats snack

Social Indicators

- ☐ Takes a social role in group
- ☐ Interacts with peers
- ☐ Interacts with group leader
- ☐ Interacts with parents and/or siblings

Body language indicators:

- ☐ Makes eye contact with group leader and other children
- ☐ Does not pace, rock, bite fingernails, have ticks, ring hands, cry
- ☐ Relaxed
- ☐ Facial Expressions: interested, lively, attentive, etc.

General Comments:

ORIENTATION FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Orientation Outline

- Introduce the group leaders. (Session begins with parents, children, and all group leaders in the same room.)
- Introduce the program and the agency: Main goals of the group, group structure, time table, expectations from parents and children (confidentiality, child safety issues, being on time). [See Facilitator Notes 1,2,3,and 4.]
- Have time for questions and answers (both parents and children).
- Arrange the children into groups. Each group goes to the assigned room with the group leaders. In the room, the children introduce themselves, and group leaders answer the children's questions, if they have any. Another program facilitator stays with the parents, further discusses with them group goals and possible influences, and answers their questions. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Children return to the main group, and the families leave. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- If a child misses the group orientation session, they can make it up in an individual or small group orientation session.
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ **Main Theme**

Introducing the agency, staff, and program.

▪ **Desired Outcomes for the Child and the Parent**

1. To become familiar with the agency, staff, and program.
2. To wish to participate in the group.

▪ **General Considerations**

PREVENTING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF GROUP ATTENDANCE FOR THE CHILDREN

As our research indicated, the group is perceived initially by most children as a serious, threatening place. Many of them do not come of their own free will but are “strongly prompted” to do so by their parents. Things negatively associated with group participation as reported by children and mothers include leaving school early, missing a favorite television show or a club activity, confront the father's opposition to group, and facing the difficult issues of substance abuse and violence in the family.

An orientation for children and parents allows the children to become familiar with the agency and the program in a gradual and safe manner. Take all possible measures to avoid negative group-related consequences for the child by scheduling group after school hours and by seeking both parents' support and participation in the program whenever possible.

KEEPING THE PARENTS INFORMED ABOUT GROUP

Several parents in our study felt frustrated and left out because they did not have satisfactory information about what their children were doing in the group. More specifically, this problem was related to confidentiality issues. Parents appeared to understand the purpose and benefits of the norm of confidentiality, but many of the mothers interviewed could not avoid feeling curious, uneasy, rejected, and out of control when their children chose not to share group experience with them. Confidentiality seemed to put a boundary between child and mother.

A discussion of group structure, contents, and norms in the orientation provides parents with the initial information they need to feel comfortable with their child's group participation. Be sure to make parents aware that their child will be constructing a safety plan, drawing a violent event and participating in activities that focus on the good and bad things that hands can do. In this way, the orientation can prevent potential misunderstandings and frustrations caused by lack of sufficient information. Obviously, further and more detailed communication with parents regarding group activities and their potential effect on the child needs to be carried all through the nine group sessions. However, all information about the child that is provided to parents should be content based rather than based on the behavior of the child.

Children need to understand that they can talk with their parents about their personal group experiences, but not about what other children did or said in group.

Introduction of Group Goals

We would like to do many things in this group. All the children participating come from families whose mothers are seeking treatment for drug use, mental health issues, and other problems that often affect their children. In this group, we talk about some of the things that children see, hear, and think when their mothers have these problems. This may not always be easy, but we have learned from other children that after talking about it in group, many of them feel better about themselves and their families. It is very important to help you feel good about yourselves. We want you to feel strong and safe, and we talk about ways that can help you feel this way. And we also have fun; we have snacks; and sometimes play.

▪ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. PRESENTATION OF GROUP GOALS

It is important to introduce all four goals to the group and help the participants understand that all the children in the group have been affected by their mother's trauma, alcohol and drug use, and mental health issues. Children and parents need to understand that the group is not just a socializing experience.

Major Group Goals*

1. To "break the secret" of abuse in their families.
2. To learn to protect themselves.
3. To experience the group as a positive and safe environment.
4. To strengthen their self-esteem.

** Further discussion of group goals can be found on pages 15-22 of the Groupwork with Children of Battered Women Manual*

2. ORIENTATION'S AUDIENCE

Keep in mind that both children and parents are your audience in the orientation, so use language and presentation style adequate for all ages. Both parents and children may have questions and concerns they would not like to raise in the presence of each other. Such concerns could be discussed when the children are taken by their group leaders to see the group room.

We sometimes use big puppets to present the group in the orientation. This seems to attract younger children and to be accepted with a smile by older children and parents.

3. ABSENCES AND BEING LATE FOR GROUP

It is our experience that the rate of no-shows for group participants in a community-based agency is relatively high. Many of the children assigned to group after the intake end up not showing on the first group session for a variety of reasons. To ensure that there are enough participants in each group, the groups will remain open through the third session meaning any child can join the group until session four. A child can make up the orientation and the first three sessions individually or in small groups. The fourth session will be closed as well as all those following. In order for a child to move on to session four, they must have completed at least two sessions, in addition to orientation, with the group, individually or in a smaller group. Emphasize the importance of children's participation in each group session and of arriving on time. Let the parent know that the group leader shares a joint

responsibility in this and will make every effort to start each session on time. If a child arrives more than twenty-five minutes late for a session, they can participate in that session but the late arrival must be recorded on the attendance sheet provided with each session's outline. Children may have difficulties joining the group when they arrive late or after missing a previous session. We recommend that children who miss more than one session after session three and do not make it up discontinue their participation in the current group and start in a new group at a later time. Parents should also be made aware that the group is a commitment and if their child can not attend, they should make a phone call to the group leader.

4. ORIENTATION'S BOUNDARIES

The orientation is not a therapy or a parenting session, but aims primarily to provide information about the children's group. It is important that this be understood by parents and children and that you not allow the discussion to slide into personal issues that cannot be dealt with fully in this setting.

5. DISCUSSING GROUP INFLUENCES WITH PARENTS

The presentation of group goals to parents can follow the outline presented in Chapter 2 (Box 2.1 and Figure 2.1). It is important that parents understand not only the group goals and processes but also the potential influence on their children's behavior and on themselves. Parents need to be aware that group participation may create both healing and stressful effects stemming from group attendance, group activities and processes, and the achievement of group intended results (see Chapter 2 for more details). Specifically, parents need to be aware of the possible group effects outlined on the following page. Be sure to educate parents about these possible effects without overemphasizing or overstating. The statement in the box on the following page should be read in its entirety at orientation. Be sure to read the statement slowly and stop if anyone has any questions. Also be sure to make the mothers aware that a peer support person will be available if needed.

Statement to be Read at Orientation

In choosing to have your child/children participate in this group, you have taken a very important positive step towards receiving the services that you and your family need to recover. We want to make sure that you are aware of some of the obstacles that come with entering this group. Our staff is committed to ensuring that your involvement with the group be as comfortable for you as possible. Your choice to go forward with this study will be an important contribution for opening the door to services for hundreds of women and families who need these services.

The research interviewer that you have met with has already talked to you about mandatory reporting. I wanted to take a moment to answer any questions you may still have about what this may mean for you and your family. (PAUSE) I would also like to take this opportunity to discuss some potential issues that may make you feel unsafe during your child's group experience:

- Children may talk about feelings and thoughts and ask questions regarding the violence and substance abuse they have not shared before with their parents. Discussing these issues may be emotionally stressful for the parents.
- Children may use new words and ideas they learned in group to define behaviors of people around them, including parents, as abusive or violent. This can be challenging to parents, who may feel criticized by their child.
- Children may display unusual or intensified behavior (e.g., acting out, withdrawal) after group sessions that were emotionally stressful for them.
- Children may behave in a more assertive way (or in what seems to them as assertive ways). For example, they might resist unwanted touch as part of trying to maintain safe personal space.

These effects are normal when children go into different types of treatment. I know that this may still be upsetting to you, and I think it may be beneficial for you to talk with someone that you are presently receiving services from about your concerns. Sometimes, people feel worse before they feel better, and our staff is dedicated to making you and your family feel as safe as possible during your child's treatment.

Our staff is determined to support you and your family through this process every step of the way. Please voice any concerns that you have at any time, and do not hesitate to contact us if you do not feel that we are living up to our commitment. We have a peer support person available to talk with you if you feel it would be beneficial.

We greatly appreciate your participation and we look forward to seeing your child next week.

Help parents understand how these potentially problematic effects are an integral part of a healing process for the child. Reassure parents that they can turn to you with questions and concerns whenever the need arises during the group.

6. TREATS

A snack and a small reinforcement (e.g., a sticker, a balloon) should be provided to each of the children during the orientation and also at the end of each session.

WEEK ONE: GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Outline for Session One

- Message: “It’s okay to feel and express feelings.”
- Introductions: Introduce yourselves and then ask each child to say his or her name and why he or she is here [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- Have each child decorate and laminate a name placard that will be used during each group session.
- Introduce the agency (agency’s name, purpose, and clientele). You may start by asking the children to tell you what the name of the agency means.
- Introduce the program (structure of program and of each session, timetable, and general contents).
- Have “Getting to Know Each Other” Activity: [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Group Rules and Discipline: Develop and establish group rules (children and group leaders). [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Have children decorate a poster board outlining the rules the group has developed.
- Check-In: Introduce check-in as part of each group session. Do check-in for today’s group: “How did you feel about coming here, and how did you feel in the group today?” [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Closure: “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “It’s okay to talk about abuse in the group.” [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ Message

“It’s okay to feel and express feelings.”

- **Desired Outcomes for the Child**

1. To feel comfortable with group leaders and other children
2. To understand the structure and main content of the program
3. To be willing or to desire to come to the next group session

- **General Considerations**

ROOM SETTING

The group room should be hospitable for children. The space should be large enough to allow free play and some physical activity. We have found large floor cushions to be the most comfortable sitting arrangement. Minimal required furniture and equipment are floor cushions, table and chairs for drawing and writing activities, a chalkboard or easel board, paper, pencils and crayons, free-play toys, and accessories (including puppets). We also strongly recommend having a VCR in the group room.

SNACK

Children in our research talked about the snack as one of the most memorable aspects of group. The snack seemed to have contributed significantly to the children's positive and fun experience in the group. Some children are simply hungry after school, and most enjoy snacking anytime. The snack is also an opportunity for modeling egalitarian gender roles when both male and female group leaders prepare and serve the food.

We prefer nonsugared "health" snacks such as fruits, popcorn, and crackers with cheese or peanut butter. As a beverage, we prefer water or juice. To celebrate the last session, the children can be treated to their own choice of snack (e.g., ice cream, pizza).

The snack should be prepared and brought to the group room before the session starts. The decision about when to serve the snack depends on the session's agenda and on group dynamics. We usually serve the snack in the first half of the session and continue with the next activity while the children eat and drink.

BREAKING THE SECRET

"Breaking the secret" is a widely used metaphor for a common goal of intervention with victims of family violence. The phrase alludes not only to the tangible, solid nature of the emotional isolation that many child witnesses of domestic violence and substance abuse appear to experience but also to the work required to deal with it. Breaking the secret is a long, complex, and painful process that involves the ability to identify and define violence, the awareness of feelings produced by the exposure to violence and its consequences, and the

power to share with trusted others these feelings and the traumatic events that brought them about.

This process begins with the children's first visit to the agency and continues throughout the group. The first group session is especially difficult for children because it forces them to face the existence of violence in their family in a group situation. Most children know that they are in the group because of the violence and that others know it as well. Consider the following quotes from our study:

First I thought it was weird, because the first day I thought it was about the whole family doing abuse, and my mom said that it was about my dad drinking and stuff and doing stuff, but I thought it was for the whole family... I never talked about my family [before]... I was shy and stuff because I didn't want to be around people I didn't know. (9-year-old boy, 4 months after group)

I thought [the group] would be like, you'd have to talk about everything that happened in the past. Anyway, I'm going like, "Oh no! Oh no! Oh no! There's no way I am telling my life, it's my personal stuff." (9-year-old girl, 1 month after group)

The main challenge of the first group session is to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere that encourages the children to come to the second group session willingly, while at the same time being clear that the group centers on children's experiences with violence and substance abuse at home. Children need to know that they will not be forced to share personal "stuff" and to believe that the group leaders and the other children will be able to handle the things they may wish to share.

▪ **Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought**

1. INTRODUCTIONS

Beginning the group by asking the children to say why they think they are here sends the children an important message. We let them know that they are in the group for a reason and not just for fun, that we plan to discuss violence and substance abuse related issues in the group, and that we want them to talk about what happened in their families and that they can handle it.

2. "GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER" ACTIVITY

Decorate Your Name. Each person writes his or her name on a paper and decorates it with a design that expresses who he or she is. When finished, the drawings are presented to the group. This activity will be used for both age groups. Younger children may have some difficulty writing their name and leaders should be sensitive to this issue. A leader may have to write the name for the child and then allow them to decorate it. These cards should then be laminated and used during each group session.

Essential Rules for Group Participants

- Confidentiality (with the exception of suspicion of child abuse)
- No physical or verbal abuse or coercion
- Respect for others' opinions, feelings, and personal space (including listening while others talk)

3. GROUP RULES AND DISCIPLINE

Group rules are a form of contract between the children and the group leaders and among the children. Rules allow clarity and predictability, basic components of a safe environment for children. Such an environment is especially important for child witnesses of domestic violence who have experienced emotional and physical threat or abuse. Rules need not be overemphasized; however, maintain as few rules as possible, and establish only realistic rules.

Children can suggest rules they would like to have in the group. This establishes the children's ownership of the group and thus empowers them. It is your responsibility, however, to ensure that certain essential rules are established and that inappropriate rules are not established. We consider the rules listed in the box on the previous page to be "essential rules."

Other rules suggested by the children can be added. However, rules that contradict the essential rules should not be accepted. Discuss unacceptable rules and help the children understand why these rules would not benefit the group. For example, a child in one of our groups suggested the rule "no talking without the permission of the teachers." We told her that this rule probably works well in school but that here in the group people may feel better if they can talk when they think they have something important to say and if it does not interfere with someone else talking.

Group rules should be written on a colorful poster to serve both as a constant reminder and as a decoration of the group room. Children can sign their names on the rules poster. This both empowers the children and helps establish the contractual nature of the rules.

Suggestions for Effective Discipline

- Tell the child what to do, instead of what not to do.
- Avoid power struggles. Ask questions, rather than make statements.
- Let your tone of voice and posture do part of the work; bend to the child's height and speak softly.
- Keep your suggestions and directions to a minimum.
- Criticize the behavior, not the child.
- Redirect undesirable behavior.
- Look for creative solutions.

Once rules are established, it is your responsibility to enforce them. It is extremely important that group rules be enforced consistently and assertively from the beginning. Remember that groups need a balance of both intimacy and authority in order to work. Rule enforcement is a crucial factor in your ability to work with children who tend to act out. Your response to rule violations is a modeling opportunity for positive and constructive (rather than punitive and abusive) discipline. Effective discipline is a shared problem-solving process, rather than an adversarial confrontation. The suggestions in the box on the previous page may be helpful to keep in mind.

A common example of rule violation that can be very disruptive for the group is when a child does not listen to what another child is saying as part of a group activity but instead distracts other children by teasing or talking with them. The box on the following page shows examples of good and poor rule enforcement efforts in such a case.

Examples of Rule Enforcement in Group

Setting: The group (10- to 12-year-olds) sits in a circle; children present family drawings they made. Rachel shows her drawing and starts to name her family members. Steve tries to draw with a crayon on Mike's leg. Mike chuckles, pulls his leg away, and tells Steve to stop. Steve tries again.

An example of poor rule enforcement:

Group Leader Steve, stop it! You seem not to care much about getting to know Rachel's family. Please put the crayon in the box and listen.

Steve (keeps the crayon) Okay, I will stop.

Group Leader (in a stern tone) I asked you to put the crayon back in the box. Please do it so we can continue.

Steve (raises his voice a little) Why do you care if I keep it? I don't do anything with it!

Group Leader You've heard what I said! One of the rules in this group is to respect each other, and you were disrespectful to Rachel. Come on, let's get it done with.

Steve I wasn't! I was just holding this crayon. I need to go to the bathroom. (gets up and leaves the room)

An example of good rule enforcement:

Group Leader Steve, Rachel is telling us about her family now. Maybe you want to draw on a paper while you listen?

Steve Okay. (doodles for a while and then rolls the paper into a tube and sticks it in Mike's arm)

Group Leader Steve, one of our rules here is to listen respectfully to each other. When you tease Mike, it is hard for Rachel to talk and for us to listen. Would you like a little break outside to help you get more relaxed?

Steve No, I don't wanna go outside.

Group Leader Okay, you don't have to, but then it means that you listen to Rachel, and once she is done, we will want to hear about your family too.

4. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. In this session, check-in is introduced at the end of the meeting and is limited to a discussion of children's feelings about the first session. For all other sessions, check-in takes place at the beginning and centers on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. The box on the following page presents an example.

An Example of Check-In Dialogue

Group Leader Well, Mike. How did it feel coming here today?

Mike Okay

Group Leader Can you say more about how you felt?

Mike It wasn't the greatest thing.

Group Leader Yeah, for most of the children who come here, it's not very easy the first time. Do you know why you weren't so excited about coming here?

Mike Because I couldn't go to my soccer game.

Group Leader Yeah, it can be annoying to miss a game. How do you feel now, after the group today?

Mike Okay, I suppose.

Group Leader Ahhmm...

Mike It's okay. It's not really like school.

It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss "highs" and "lows" of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

5. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure “ritual” that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the “squeezed” person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other’s hands. We try to respect the children’s wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child’s ability to verbalize the group’s message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as “It’s okay to talk about abuse,” “Abuse is not okay,” and “The violence is not my fault.” However, variables such as the children’s personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children’s readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK TWO: WHAT HANDS CAN DO

Outline for Session Two

- Message: “Abuse and violence are not okay.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: SAD.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- Review group rules.
- “What is abuse?”: Define violence and abuse and talk about their different forms. This can be done by brainstorming different ways of being abusive, with puppets who present scenes of abuse (especially effective for explaining emotional abuse), or with visual aids such as pictures of abusive behaviors the children have to identify. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- “What Hands Can Do” poster activity. The 5-7 year old group will work together to construct one poster. The 8-10 year old group will draw their posters individually. [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “Abuse is not okay.” [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ MESSAGE

“Abuse and violence are not okay.”

▪ Desired Outcomes for the Child

1. To become familiar with group participants, structure, and rules
2. To participate in activities about domestic violence
3. To learn that abuse is not okay under any circumstances
4. To learn basic definitions of violence and abuse

▪ General Considerations

By learning to define abuse, children construct a “violence vocabulary” that allows them to talk about abuse, share abusive experiences, and assign responsibility for abusive behavior. This information also enables them to learn that abuse is not okay and that it is not their fault when their parents fight.

Our research interviews and observations suggest that most, if not all, children can define abuse, distinguish among forms of abuse, and state that “abuse is not okay” at the end of the group and later on. However, it appears that although children know that abuse is wrong, parents sometimes think that their children do not apply this knowledge to their own behavior.

The process of defining interactions as abusive also can cause unintended stress for family members. Several mothers reported that their behavior was criticized by their children, who used the new information gained in the group. In the light of new knowledge acquired in the group, children may reevaluate their parents’ behavior and parenting style. This appraisal occasionally has put parents in uncomfortable and even stressful positions. For example, a mother recalled the following:

I guess she got into the aspects of the idea, of the abuse. The whole idea about abuse, and how people couldn’t be abusive any more... And in another sense she kind of used it too, to her advantage, by making statements... she would say things like, “Well, if you touch me, I’ll turn you in for child abuse!”... I felt like there were times when she has gotten, when she used it a lot... I sometimes, I don’t know if [the group] was good or bad. (Mother of a 9-year-old girl, 4 months after group)

Uncomfortable feedback by the child also, at times, had a potentially positive secondary impact on the parent:

[My son] has occasionally told me if I was hollering, ‘cause hollering was a big pattern in my family too, screaming and hollering and carrying on like that. And I really tried to cut down, but it, ya’ know, that’s gonna take me time too, but he said, ya’ know, “You’re being abusive” and he does use this work which annoyed me at first, but I will usually stop and think about what he’s saying to me. (Mother of a 10-year-old boy, 2 months after group)

Such a feedback, coming from the child, can serve as reinforcement for a parent going through a change process aimed at nonabusive interaction patterns. This might especially be the case with parents who have completed groups for abusers or victims/survivors. Parents who have not going through groups themselves may find “anti-abusive” responses of their child to be threatening, even to the point of further violence. Thus it is important to discuss this possible effect of the group with the parents during orientation and during the parenting group.

▪ **Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought**

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (SAD)

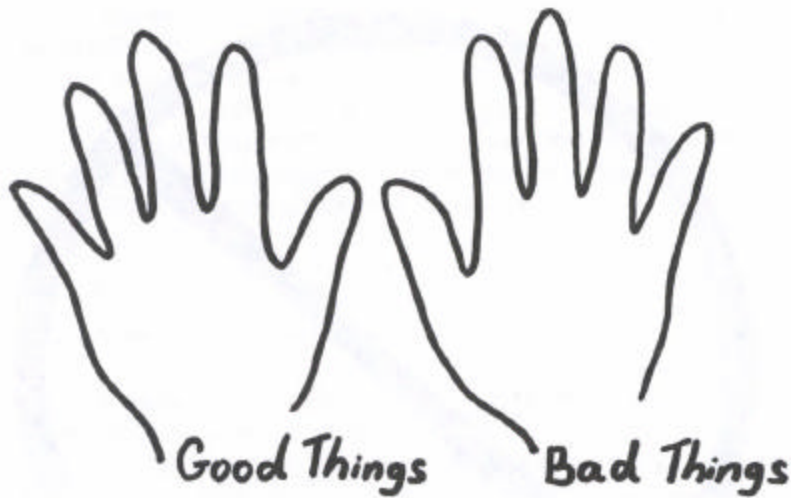
This activity is part of the group's “feeling education,” which continually reaffirms the legitimacy of all feelings and their appropriate expression. Its aim is to strengthen children's awareness of different feelings, to help them label feelings, and to allow them to express different feelings. In all but the first and last sessions, you will focus on and discuss one feeling, usually at the beginning of the session after check-in. Most of the feelings discussed are relevant to the session's main theme. These feelings are: sad, angry, safe, hurt, afraid, strong, and brave.

Briefly present and discuss the “feeling of the day”: sad. After the initial presentation of the feeling, each child and group leader tells the group about a time in the last week when he or she felt this way. Sometimes it is difficult for children to remember a recent occasion; in that case, they can choose any relevant occasion they remember. Help the children understand better how they felt and what triggered the feeling and to connect the feeling with behavior (e.g., “what did you do when you felt sad?”)

3. DEFINING ABUSE

People in all age groups tend to define a behavior by giving examples of it. We suggest that you include in the discussion of the different kinds of abuse – physical, sexual, and emotional – a general definition of abuse. *Abuse* can be defined as any behavior that physically or emotionally hurts another person and that is not an accident. Also discuss feelings that result from being abused and from abusing, such as fear, guilt, and feeling bad about oneself. Be sure to use age appropriate language in your discussions.

Emotional abuse is often more subtle than physical abuse and harder to identify. It is also a form of abuse that often is normalized and minimized. A definition of *emotional abuse* that can be used with children is “when one person makes another person feel really bad about him- or herself, and not by accident.” Help children understand emotional abuse by giving them examples they can relate to, such as bullying behavior in school or putdowns by siblings. Then discuss how similar behaviors can occur between adults. The term *emotional abuse* can be replaced with *feeling abuse* for younger children.



4. POSTER DRAWING

This activity combines an educational message with an opportunity for creativity. The completed posters also can serve as decorations for the group room or for the agency.

What Hands Can Do.

The 5-7 year old group will do this activity in a group. The group leader will draw two hands on a large piece of paper and ask the children to think about how hands can help or hurt. The group leader will then write their thoughts around each of the hands. The leader should be sure each child has a chance to speak.

The 8-10 year old group will do this activity individually. Instruct the children to trace both of their hands on paper. Ask them to think about how hands can help or hurt, to write their thoughts around each of the hands, and then to decorate them. Give each child time after they have completed their drawing to show it to the group and speak about what they wrote around their hands.

5. POSITIVE AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

Although it appears to be a simple exercise, it is our experience that many children find this activity very difficult. Some children are not used to being complimented, or even to thinking positively about themselves. Others will need your help in differentiating between participation in an enjoyable activity and appreciating an enjoyable trait in themselves (e.g., "I like playing football" vs. "I am good at football"). Still, it is important to insist on helping each child find a personal positive affirmation each week. For example:

I think that it was good that they have these, like, positive affirmations. ...It's something you like about yourself or someone said nice to you or something like that. (A 9-year-old boy, 4 months after group)

6. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure "ritual" that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the "squeezed" person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other's hands. We try to respect the children's wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK THREE: ANGER

Outline for Session Three

- Message: “It’s okay to be angry and express it, but it is not okay to abuse others with my anger.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: ANGRY.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- A story and a discussion. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Children ages 5-7 will read *The Monster Boy*. **(Please note that *The Monster Boy* is no longer currently in press, but may be available from the library or via the internet)**
- Children ages 8-10 will read *Don’t Rant and Rave on Wednesdays*.
- Discussion: Do you ever get angry like the people in the story? What do you do when you get angry? Is it okay to hurt others when you are mad at them? Who is a safe person to talk with when you get mad?
- “Personal expression of anger” exercise [See Facilitator Note 4.]

Younger children: Ask children to act out, in turn, their typical behavior/response when they are angry (e.g., “What do you do when you are angry?” “How do you look when you are angry?”). The acting is followed by a discussion of personal and general appropriate and inappropriate expressions of anger.

Older children: Children draw a picture or make a sculpture with clay that represents how they feel when they are angry. Discuss personal and general appropriate and inappropriate expressions of anger.

- Free-time activity. The 5-7 year old group will do the *Dancing with Crepe Paper Exercise*. The 8-10 year old group will do *Relaxation Exercises*. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “It’s okay to be angry but not to abuse others with my anger.” [See Facilitator Note 7.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ Message

“It’s okay to be angry and express it, but it is not okay to abuse others with my anger.”

- **Desired Outcomes for the Child**

1. To learn that all feelings, including “bad” ones, need to be acknowledged and felt
2. To know it is okay to express all feelings in group
3. To recognize one’s own expressions of anger
4. To learn to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate expressions and anger

- **Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought**

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session’s main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (ANGRY)

Briefly present and discuss the “feeling of the day”: angry. After the initial presentation of the feeling, each child and group leader tells the group about a time in the last week when he or she felt this way. Sometimes it is difficult for children to remember a recent occasion; in that case, they can choose any relevant occasion they remember. Help the children understand better how they felt and what triggered the feeling and to connect the feeling with behavior (e.g., “what did you do when you felt angry?”)

Anger is usually the most familiar feeling for child witnesses of domestic violence. Often it is a secondary feeling that masks other feelings, such as shame, fear, and pain. It is also a

feeling connected most immediately with the eruption of violence. This is why we chose to devote an entire session to exploring anger.

3. STORIES

Young children usually love to be told stories. Older children, however, may think it a childish activity. In this case, you can let the children participate in reading a story by passing the book around the circle and letting each child read a page. You may want to guide the children's listening by asking them to pay attention to certain issues in the story, such as the suggested discussion questions.

4. PERSONAL EXPRESSION OF ANGER

This activity has two purposes: (a) to help children recognize their own appropriate and inappropriate ways of expressing anger and, if needed, (b) to teach them alternative behaviors. Appropriate ways of expressing anger are those that do not involve the abuse of self, other people, animals, or property. Davis (1984), in her book *Something Is Wrong at My House*, suggests: "I can get rid of some of the mad feelings in me without being mean. I feel better when I run, dance, jump rope, play my drums, draw a picture, write a story or make up a song" (p. 18).

Some professionals suggest that hitting a pillow or another unbreakable object is a legitimate and therapeutic way of releasing anger. We oppose this view. Hitting an object is closely associated with abuse. It can serve as a modeling of physical violence and can constitute a threat in and of itself. The message we want to convey to children is that hitting is wrong in any shape or form.

Some children, especially preadolescent boys, may use different violent behaviors to express their anger, thus becoming both victims and perpetrators of violence. Such behaviors can include torturing animals, bullying other children, vandalism, and hitting their siblings or parents. In some extreme cases, you may want to refer the child to a young perpetrators group or to individual therapy around these issues.

5. FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

Free-time activities are meant to give children a break from the regular activities of the group and, when needed, to allow them to relax and release tension accumulated in other activities.

Activity for 5-7 year olds:

Dancing With Crepe Paper. Put colorful, light crepe paper in the center of the room. Play music and encourage the children to choose a piece of paper and dance with it. Remind them to be careful not to bump into each other while dancing. In harmony with the music, children can pretend they are on the moon, on a tropical island, or elsewhere.

Activity for 8-10 year olds:

Relaxation Exercises*

Instructions

One way to relax when you feel tense
is to OUT-TENSION THE TENSION!
Next time your muscles feel tight,
TIGHTEN them even more!
Start with your feet.
Curl your toes into a TIGHT ball.
Feel the tension build.

Now TIGHTEN your legs,
then your stomach,
then your chest.
Now tighten your hands,
your arms, your shoulders,
your neck...your face...your head.
From the tips of your toes,
to the tops of your eyebrows—
your muscles are TIGHT WITH TENSION!
HOLD IT!
COUNT TO FIVE – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 .

Now RELEASE every part of your body.
Let all the tension go...
RELAX...RELAX...RELAX
until you're as limp as a rag doll.

Or...BREATHE YOUR TENSION AWAY.
Lie down in a quiet place.
close your eyes,
and place your hands over your ribs.
Think of your belly as a balloon.
TAKE A DEEP BREATH.
BREATHE IN SLOWLY through your nose
until the balloon feels full.
HOLD IT.
COUNT TO FIVE – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.
Then BREATHE OUT SLOWLY
through your mouth.
Repeat the exercise several times.
Each time you will become
more and more RELAXED.

Now...

Pretend you're a butterfly
floating on the breeze.
Imagine a peaceful meadow
Where the beautiful flowers gently sway.
Feel warm sunlight flow through your veins.

Tell yourself:

"My whole body is warm and comfortable.
I am calm and relaxed.
Because I am calm and relaxed,
everything is okay.
I can handle my problem."

Relaxing may not solve every problem,
but once you relax,
problems won't seem quite so big,
and it will be easier to solve them.

*From *Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays: The Children's Anti-Stress Book*, by Adolph Moser. Landmark Editions, Inc., MI.

6. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

7. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure "ritual" that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the "squeezed" person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group

content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other's hands. We try to respect the children's wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK FOUR: DRUG ABUSE

Outline for Session Four

- Message: I'm not the only one whose parents use drugs."
- Check-in. "How was your week?" "How did you feel about coming here today?" [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- Re-introduction of name cards.
- **Feeling of the day: SAFE.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Substance Abuse Video: *Coping With a Parent who Drinks or Abuses Drugs.*
- Discuss the video: Can you remember a time when you saw a parent using drugs? How did that make you feel? What are some safe places you can go if you know your parent is using drugs?
- Begin preparation for safety plan in Session 8. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- "Pass the Squeeze"; Optional message: "I'm not the only one whose parents use drugs." "Using drugs can hurt families." [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Snack should be included during the video in this session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

☐ Message

"I'm not the only one whose parents use drugs."

☐ Desired Outcomes for the Child

1. To raise awareness of some of the feelings produced by the experience of a parent who abuses drugs (anger, pain, frustration, guilt, sadness; feeling mixed up, ashamed, guilty.)
2. To know that other families experience the effects of drug abuse.

☐ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in.

At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (SAFE)

Briefly present and discuss the “feeling of the day”: safe. After the initial presentation of the feeling, each child and group leader tells the group about a time in the last week when he or she felt this way. Sometimes it is difficult for children to remember a recent occasion; in that case, they can choose any relevant occasion they remember. Help the children understand better how they felt and what triggered the feeling and to connect the feeling with behavior. “Can you remember a time when you felt safe/unsafe?” Children need recognition and support for all feelings whether they are safe or unsafe. Also discuss drugs and alcohol as both being substances subject to possible abuse or excess. What does this do to a family/parents/children? Use this session to help children feel less isolated in their experience of drugs and alcohol in their family, and help them articulate a positive self-referring statement.

3. PREPARATION FOR SAFETY PLAN

During this session group leaders should begin preparing for the safety plan activity that will take place in Session 8. This activity asks the children to formulate an individualized safety plan by writing down safe people and places they can go to in cases of emergency. Because this issue is also discussed in the video the children watch in this session, the group leaders should start preparing the children to think about what safe places and people are present in their lives. As children think of these things, the group leader should record them on the spaces provided on the session cover sheet. Once the children reach Session 8, the group leader can refer back to his/her notes and use them to aid the child in the construction of the safety plan.

4. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

5. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure "ritual" that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the "squeezed" person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other's hands. We try to respect the children's wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK FIVE: SHARING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH VIOLENCE

Outline for Session Five

- Messages: “I’m not the only one whose parents fight.” “It’s okay to tell the group about the violence in my family.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1]
- **Feeling of the day: HURT.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- Children draw a violent event or a “scary fight” that has happened in their family. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Children present their drawings. Talk about the children’s feelings at the time of the event and while doing the drawings.
- Free-time activity. The 5-7 year old group will do the *Dancing with Crepe Paper Exercise*. The 8-10 year old group will do *Relaxation Exercises*. [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- Preparation for safety plan activity in Session 8. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “It’s okay to tell the group about violence in my family.” [See facilitator Note 7.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ Messages

“I’m not the only one whose parents fight.”

“It’s okay to tell the group about the violence in my family.”

▪ Desired Outcomes for the Child

1. To share with the group personal and family experiences related to violence and to experience the accompanying feelings.
2. To know that the other children in the group experience violence as well.

▪ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (HURT)

Hurt as used here means both physical and emotional pain. Children more readily think of concrete examples of physical hurt. Encourage the children to acknowledge and discuss the more intangible incidents during which they felt emotionally hurt.

3. DRAWING A VIOLENT EVENT

Drawing and discussing a witnessed violent event allows children to examine some of their thoughts and feelings about the violence, to get support for the, and to learn about the witnessing experiences, feelings, and thoughts of other group members.

This activity can be very painful for children. Expressing feelings tied to traumatic experiences is a difficult and stressful experience in and of itself, even when it is legitimated and supported. The following observations from our study illustrate how emotionally loaded this activity can be:

[Group Leader (GL) A asks the children to draw the most violent event they either saw or heard in their family.]

Sharon Well, there was no violence in my family, nothing really happened.

GL A Was there any yelling or threatening?

Sharon Yeah.

GL A Well, you know, that's what you should draw.

[Sharon is getting agitated. She plays with her juice and makes all kinds of grimaces.]

Sharon (after a short while) Can I draw myself as an animal again?
GL A Sure.

[Sharon starts drawing an animal, and while drawing, groans and moans.]

Sharon I can't! I can't draw it. I can't do yelling.

[Sharon talks with GL A about drawing yelling and other alternatives. She keeps drawing for a while and then stops and puts her face on the floor. Then she raises her head again and continues to draw. She says she is frustrated because she can't draw a lion the way she would like. Then she turns her paper to the other side and starts a new picture.]

GL B You know, sometimes when we do things like that, it brings back all the feelings we felt when these things happened. That's fine. We know it's hard, but it's all right.

GL A Sometimes we feel sad or mad about the things that happened.

[The children continue to draw for a while. Amy tells GL A she doesn't feel very well and goes out to drink water. Then Sharon says she doesn't feel very well, stops drawing, hugs her stuffed giraffe, and lies down on the floor, curled like a baby with her giraffe. She is saying again that she doesn't feel very well, that she wasn't feeling well all the time, but that now she really doesn't feel well.] (Observations of seventh group session; children are 8- and 9-year-olds)

As illustrated in the above quote, children often deal with the bad feelings produced by this exercise by talking with peers, drawing other pictures, walking around the room, tearing up or scribbling on their pictures, or refusing to draw altogether. Support the children by affirming their difficulties. Encourage, but do not force, them to draw. Some children may be able to talk about but not draw the most violent event. Soft background music can create a pleasant atmosphere and help children concentrate on their drawings.

When the children present their drawings, support and encourage them, but do not push them to talk about what they are not ready to share with the group. Allow the children to talk about their pictures or the events they drew without showing the picture itself.

This session's focus on the family's most difficult moments can be distressing and even disempowering for the children. Although some of the pain cannot be avoided, you can help the children by reminding them of their parents' strength in coping with the violence (by looking for help and by working to prevent further incidents of abuse).

4. FREE-TIME ACTIVITY

The purpose of this activity is to allow children to release some of the tension accumulated while drawing and talking about the violent events that happened in their families. The same free time activities used in session 3 will be used here.

Activity for 5-7 year olds

Dancing With Crepe Paper. Put colorful, light crepe paper in the center of the room. Play music and encourage the children to choose a piece of paper and dance with it. Remind them to be careful not to bump into each other while dancing. In harmony with the music, children can pretend they are on the moon, on a tropical island, or elsewhere.

Activity for 8-10 year olds

Relaxation Exercises*

Instructions

One way to relax when you feel tense
is to OUT-TENSION THE TENSION!
Next time your muscles feel tight,
TIGHTEN them even more!
Start with your feet.
Curl your toes into a TIGHT ball.
Feel the tension build.

Now TIGHTEN your legs,
then your stomach,
then your chest.
Now tighten your hands,
your arms, your shoulders,
your neck...your face...your head.
From the tips of your toes,
to the tops of your eyebrows—
your muscles are TIGHT WITH TENSION!
HOLD IT!
COUNT TO FIVE – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 .

Now RELEASE every part of your body.
Let all the tension go...
RELAX...RELAX...RELAX
until you're as limp as a rag doll.

Or...BREATHE YOUR TENSION AWAY.
Lie down in a quiet place.
Close your eyes,
and place your hands over your ribs.
Think of your belly as a balloon.
TAKE A DEEP BREATH.
BREATHE IN SLOWLY through your nose
until the balloon feels full.
HOLD IT.
COUNT TO FIVE – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

Then BREATHE OUT SLOWLY
through your mouth.
Repeat the exercise several times.
Each time you will become
More and more RELAXED.

Now...
Pretend you're a butterfly
floating on the breeze.
Imagine a peaceful meadow
where the beautiful flowers gently sway.
Feel warm sunlight flow through your veins.

Tell yourself:
"My whole body is warm and comfortable.
I am calm and relaxed.
Because I am calm and relaxed,
Everything is okay.
I can handle my problem."

Relaxing may not solve every problem,
but once you relax,
problems won't seem quite so big,
and it will be easier to solve them.

*From *Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays: The Children's Anti-Stress Book*, by Adolph Moser. Landmark Editions, Inc., MI.

5. PREPARATION FOR SAFETY PLAN

During this session group leaders should begin preparing for the safety plan activity that will take place in Session 8. This activity asks the children to formulate an individualized safety plan by writing down safe people and places they can go to in cases of emergency. The group leaders should start preparing the children to think about what safe places and people are present in their lives. As children think of these things, the group leader should record them on the spaces provided on the session cover sheet. Once the children reach Session 8, the group leader can refer back to his/her notes and use them to aid the child in the construction of the safety plan.

6. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

7. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure “ritual” that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the “squeezed” person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other’s hands. We try to respect the children’s wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child’s ability to verbalize the group’s message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as “It’s okay to talk about abuse,” “Abuse is not okay,” and “The violence is not my fault.” However, variables such as the children’s personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children’s readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK SIX: TOUCH

Outline for Session Six

- Message: “My body is private, and I have the right to protect it.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: AFRAID.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards
- Story

Girard, L.W. (1984). *My Body is Private*. Niles, IL: Albert Whitman. (Ages 4-9)

- Discuss the story. How do we know that a touch is a bad touch? What does our fear tell us? When do we call a bad touch sexual abuse? What can you do to protect yourself when someone touches you in a bad way?
- “Good touch-bad touch exercise. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Preparation for safety plan activity in Session 8. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 7.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “My body is private, and I have the right to protect it.” [See Facilitator Note 8.]
- Snack should be included in the session
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ Message

“My body is private, and I have the right to protect it.”

▪ Desired Outcomes for the Child

1. To learn to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate touch.
2. To know what to do in the event of attempted or actual sexual or physical abuse.
3. To know that one’s body is private and that one has the right not to share it if it feels uncomfortable.
4. To accept fear as a legitimate and helpful emotion.

- **General Considerations**

ABUSED CHILDREN

The aims of this session are to provide the children with basic definitions and an understanding of appropriate and inappropriate touch and to teach them basic protective skills. This session is not designed to be and is not sufficient as an intervention with children who were sexually or physically abused. Children you suspect or know have been abused should be referred to an agency or a clinician who deals specifically with child abuse.

Although self-disclosure of sexual or physical abuse is not encouraged in this session, be ready for the possibility that a child will disclose past or present abuse. If a child discloses abuse, acknowledge that you heard him or her (e.g., “I am sorry that it happened to you; it wasn’t your fault”) and arrange to get more details later (e.g., “I am interested in hearing more about it; maybe we can talk after group so that I can give you my full attention”).

CONFIDENTIALITY

The group rule of confidentiality may create difficulties in the cases of children who disclose information to the group about sexual, physical, or other forms of severe abuse. On the one hand, you establish the norm of confidentiality because you want the children to feel safe to disclose in the group any family secret they may have. On the other hand, you have the duty to report suspected cases of abuse, and this may be perceived by the child as a violation of the rule of confidentiality and of his or her trust in you and in the group.

This potential problem can be prevented by qualifying the rule of confidentiality in the first group session. The children need to know that you have an obligation to share any information on sexual, physical, or other severe abuse of a child if such information was not disclosed and acted on before. Although this explanation may cause some children to be more inhibited about sharing their personal experiences with the group; it will prevent the betrayal of the child’s trust in you and in the group.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Younger children may find sexual harassment difficult to understand. However, this issue could be addressed with children if they already have encountered the term in school, in the media, or anywhere else. Sexual harassment can be presented as sexually directed verbal abuse or as a verbal form of sexual abuse aimed at the child’s private body parts, sexual behavior, or sexual identity. Children should know that sexual harassment is as wrong as “touch” sexual abuse and should be responded to in the same way.

▪ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (AFRAID)

Fear, the feeling of the day, can be stressful and even paralyzing and thus is often perceived as a negative feeling. However, fear also can be presented to children as an empowering feeling; it tells us that we are at risk and that we need to do something to take care of ourselves. When we are afraid, it is a sign that something is wrong and that we need to ask ourselves what can be done to alleviate the fear. When you discuss with the children times when they felt afraid, also ask them what they did to take care of themselves.

3. “GOOD TOUCH-BAD TOUCH” EXERCISE

Fear often is mixed with feelings of ambiguity and confusion. We are often afraid when we sense that something wrong is happening but cannot identify exactly what is wrong or how to “correct” it. Children, especially in families in which touch was used in both caring and abusive ways, often get confusing messages about the meaning of physical touch and how to respond to it. This confusion may result in either fear of any kind of touch or an inability to trust one's fear as an indicator that something is wrong and that action needs to be taken. The aim of this exercise is to sensitize children to the differences between

appropriate and inappropriate touch. Once children are able to make this distinction, they can learn what to do when they are touched inappropriately.

Post on the wall a large drawing of a gender-neutral human figure, front and back. Give children red and green stickers and ask the, in turn, to put the stickers on the figure's body – red ones to mark areas of bad touches and green ones to mark areas of good touches.

Discuss additional possibilities for good and bad touches, the difference between good touch and bad touch (especially when they are in the same area of the body), and the connection between bad touch and different forms of abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional).

Box 4.19: Basic Instructions for Personal Protection

- Say no.
- Get away, if possible.
- Tell someone you trust.

4. PERSONAL PROTECTION

We recommend that you give the children clear and simple instructions regarding how to protect themselves when someone is trying to harm them. You can write these instructions on a poster or on personal cards. Basic instructions are presented in Box 4.19.

5. GENDER AND SEXUAL ABUSE

The book used during this session is directed primarily at girls. As a facilitator it is important to be aware of the shame that often surrounds male victims of sexual abuse. If there are boys in the group, be sure to pay close attention to them during the session. Emphasize that the themes in the book *My Body is Private* apply to both the girls and boys in the group. In addition, each group should have the children's book, *Daniel and his Therapist* by Linda Morgan, in the room as a resource. If needed, this book about a boy's experience with his therapist after being sexually abused should be read to the group or to an individual child.

6. PREPARATION FOR SAFETY PLAN

During this session group leaders should begin preparing for the safety plan activity that will take place in Session 8. This activity asks the children to formulate an individualized safety plan by writing down safe people and places they can go to in cases of emergency. The group leaders should start preparing the children to think about what safe places and

people are present in their lives. As children think of these things, the group leader should record them on the spaces provided on the session cover sheet. Once the children reach Session 8, the group leader can refer back to his/her notes and use them to aid the child in the construction of the safety plan.

7. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

8. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure "ritual" that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the "squeezed" person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other's hands. We try to respect the children's wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK SEVEN: ASSERTIVENESS

Outline for Session Seven

- Messages: “I have the right to be safe.” “I can be strong without being abusive.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: STRONG.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- Learning the differences between assertiveness, aggressiveness, and passivity through a discussion of a story.

5-7 year old children will read:

Cosgrove, Stephen. (1996). *Squeakers*. Putnam Publishing.

After the story is read and discussed the facilitator should read pages 43 through 46 of the *The mouse, the monster and me* and have the children practice “The Saying No Game” found on page 47.

8-10 year old children will read:

Palmer, P. (1977). *The mouse, the monster, and me*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact.

The children should read and have a discussion on the first five sections of this book (through page 47) including practicing “The Saying No Game” found on page 47.

- Assertiveness Activity: Personal Space Exercise. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Safety discussion: What are potentially dangerous situations for the children (including those related to family violence)? Who is responsible for the violence and for stopping it? How can the children protect themselves in dangerous circumstances? [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- Preparation for safety plan activity in Session 8. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “I’m a special, lovable person.” [See Facilitator Note 7.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/ reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

■ Messages

“I have the right to be safe.”

“I can be strong without being abusive.”

- **Desired Outcomes for the Child**

1. To be able to identify several personal positive qualities and strengths.
2. To know the difference between being strong and being abusive.
3. To know that a child has the right to be safe.

- **General Considerations**

ASSERTIVENESS

The aim of this session is to introduce to children the concept of *assertiveness* (as opposed to aggressiveness and passivity) and connect it with their right to be safe. This session is not assertiveness training (a much longer process) and probably will not create noticeable changes in the behavior of most children. It is important to communicate the limitations of this assertiveness session to parents in order to prevent unrealistic expectations.

PREPARING FOR THE END OF THE GROUP

Children need time to digest the coming end of the group and to prepare for it. Mention to the children in this session that only two more group sessions are left. This may upset some children who enjoyed the group and became attached to group participants and leaders. Children's feelings about the nearing end of the group may be expressed as acting out.

- **Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought**

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss "highs" and "lows" of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (STRONG)

When discussing with the children times when they felt strong, it is important to emphasize at least two ways of being strong: physically and emotionally/mentally (“inside” and “outside” strong). Help the children remember occasions when they felt strong inside and commend them on their strength.

3. ASSERTIVENESS ACTIVITY

Personal Space Exercise. The aim of this activity is to raise the children’s awareness of personal space in general and to sensitize them to their own personal boundaries.

Separate the children into two groups and have them line up facing each other on both sides of the room. Assign a partner from the opposite side of the room to each child. As one of the groups starts advancing toward the other, instruct the members of the stationary group to pay attention to their level of comfort as their designated partner moves toward them and to tell that partner “stop!” when it feels as if the child is getting too close. Repeat the exercise after switching the roles between the two groups.

After the exercise, discuss with the children their personal boundaries, personal levels of comfort, their right to maintain comfortable boundaries around their personal space, occasions when personal boundaries may be violated, and ways of handling these occasions.

4. PREPARATION FOR SAFETY PLAN

During this session group leaders should begin preparing for the safety plan activity that will take place in Session 8. This activity asks the children to formulate an individualized safety plan by writing down safe people and places they can go to in cases of emergency. The group leaders should start preparing the children to think about what safe places and people are present in their lives. As children think of these things, the group leader should record them on the spaces provided on the session cover sheet. Once the children reach Session 8, the group leader can refer back to his/her notes and use them to aid the child in the construction of the safety plan.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CHILD’S SAFETY

We hold the parents and other adults in the child’s life to be responsible for the child’s safety and well-being. However, under circumstances of family violence and other dangerous situations in which a child’s safety is at risk, we want the children to know they

need to take care of themselves. Children's ability, right, and responsibility to protect themselves do not replace the parents' responsibility for the child's safety, but rather are a way of empowering children who find themselves in dangerous situations.

6. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children's self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

7. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure "ritual" that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the "squeezed" person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other's hands. We try to respect the children's wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

WEEK EIGHT: PROTECTION PLANNING

Outline for Session Eight

- Message: “I have the right to be safe.”
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: BRAVE.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- Review the “safety discussion” from the previous week. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Work individually on Personal Protection Planning (PPP). [See Facilitator Note 4]: Talk with each child about whom to call and where to go in dangerous situations or in cases of emergency. Write this information on a personal card (older children can write their own personal cards). [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Practice calling the police or another helper on the telephone. The call first is modeled by a group leader and then is practiced by each child. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Draw a picture on the back of the PPP card. Optional topics: “Abuse is not okay,” “I deserve to be safe.”
- Briefly discuss the coming end of the group. Make a group decision about what kind of snack to have for the last day. [See Facilitator Note 7.]
- Closure: Personal affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 8.]
- “Pass the Squeeze”; Optional message: “I have the right to be safe.” [See Facilitator Note 9.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ **Message**

“I have the right to be safe.”

▪ **Desired Outcomes for the Child**

1. To identify places to go and people to call in dangerous situations and cases of emergency.
2. To learn how to use the telephone and what to say when calling police or another helper.
3. To know that group ends the next week.

▪ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

The check-in may be an opportunity for group leaders and children to express their feelings about the coming end of the group. You may want to ask the children directly how they feel about it or model for them by expressing your feelings about separating from them and from the group. Allow the children to express a range of feelings, including relief, about the ending of the group.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (BRAVE)

Briefly present and discuss the “feeling of the day”: brave. After the initial presentation of the feeling, each child and group leader tells the group about a time in the last week when he or she felt this way. Sometimes it is difficult for children to remember a recent occasion; in that case, they can choose any relevant occasion they remember. Help the children understand better how they felt and what triggered the feeling and to connect the feeling with behavior. “Can you remember a time when you felt brave?”

3. SAFETY DISCUSSION

Talk with the children about the circumstances under which they should call 911 or others for help. (Not every community has a 911 system. If your group is in a community that does not have a 911 system, teach the children the seven-digit phone number of the local police.) We are concerned that children may think it is their responsibility to “save” their mothers and stop violent events by calling 911. Such messages are reinforced by some films (e.g., *It’s Not Always Happy at My House* and *The Crown Prince*) and can add to children’s feelings of guilt for failing to prevent or stop the violence. For this reason, it is important that the discussion emphasize the children’s right and responsibility to protect *themselves*, rather than others.

Remind the children that the perpetrator is responsible for the violence and that the adults are responsible for stopping it. At the same time, let the children know that at times they may need to protect themselves from being physically hurt and then they can call 911. They also may choose to call 911 when they see that someone else is in danger, but it is not their responsibility to do so.

Talk about these self-protection issues with the children’s parents in the parenting group or individually. Recommend that parents talk and decide with their children under what circumstances the child should call 911.

4. PERSONAL PROTECTION PLANNING (PPP)

Children need to be able to protect themselves from risk both inside and outside their homes. The aim of a personal protection plan (PPP) is to equip the children with some practical, realistic, and usable skills to be used in cases of emergency. This session does not focus on the psychological aspects of these circumstances; however, some discussion of potential risks in the child’s life may be required if the child denies the possibility of future family violence and refuses to do protection planning. Although there is no need to force the possibility of future violence into the child’s consciousness, it can be pointed out as a realistic possibility that requires some consideration.

Each child needs to identify safe places to go or to hide in when he or she feels threatened or senses danger. Inside the home, these places could be the child’s room, a sibling’s room, and the basement. Safe places outside the home could be the homes of neighbors, friends, or relatives. Help the child think of possible places by discussing actual times when he or she felt the need for a safe place. Check with the child to ensure that each suggested place is truly safe and that it is a realistic option.

All children should know how to call the police in case of emergency; in most cases, this number is 911, but many rural areas are not connected to a 911 network yet, so the seven-digit phone number of the police department must be called. If possible, each child should have access to phone numbers of trusted relatives, friends, or neighbors who live nearby.

5. PERSONAL PROTECTION PLANNING CARD (SAFETY PLAN)

The PPP card gives the child quick access to critical information in times of emergency. The card contains the child's first name and PPP information, consisting of a list of safe places and phone numbers that can be used in cases of emergency. If needed, this list can be qualified by time of day, type of event, or other restrictions. Write the PPP information on the cards for younger children and supervise the older children who can write it themselves.

After the work on the card is completed, laminate it. Lamination can be done after this session and the card given to the children during the last session. Lamination is significant because it protects the card and makes it look "official" and "real." You may want to tape a quarter onto each card in case the children will need to use a pay phone to call for help. The Personal Protection Planning Card can be found on page 52 of this manual.

6. PRACTICE PHONE CALLS

The purpose of this activity is to give the children an opportunity to practice calling the police and to coach them to do it effectively. Depending on the children's ages, either a toy or a real (disconnected) phone can be used. Start by modeling a 911 (or seven-digit police number) call and then coach each of the children in turn. Emphasize the elements listed in Box 4.25

This activity may evoke strong feelings in the children, especially for those who have had a previous experience with calling the police or with having the police come to their homes. Remind the children that this is only an exercise and help the ones who experience triggered emotions.

Box 4.25: Instructions for Calling 911/Police

- The child must speak clearly and loudly (if it is safe to do so).
- The call should be concise but also include the reason for calling and the child's name, address, and phone number. (In some areas, the caller's number appears automatically on the 911 operator's screen.)
- The children should say "Please come quickly!" and, if they have the time, ask whether more information is needed at the end of the call.

7. PREPARATION FOR LAST SESSION

The last group session is an occasion for both the sadness of separation and feelings of relief and accomplishment after the hard work done in previous weeks. Acknowledge both. You may also want to take this opportunity to remind the children of the two booster sessions that will take place at one-month intervals after the close of the group.

As part of celebrating the end of the group, you can let the children have a snack of their choice. You also may give them a little souvenir, an “I am special” badge, and a “diploma” or a “certificate of completion,” all of which require advance preparation. (For details, see the “Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought” section for Session Nine.)

8. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

One of the main goals of the group is to strengthen children’s self-esteem. Positive affirmation contributes directly to the achievement of this goal by providing children with an opportunity to acknowledge and share with others something positive about themselves. In this activity, the group stands in a circle and the children, in turn, describe a positive trait or something they are good at or one way in which they felt good about themselves in the past week.

9. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure “ritual” that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the “squeezed” person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other’s hands. We try to respect the children’s wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child's ability to verbalize the group's message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as "It's okay to talk about abuse," "Abuse is not okay," and "The violence is not my fault." However, variables such as the children's personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children's readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

NINE: REVIEW AND GOOD-BYE

Outline for Session Nine

- Messages: “It’s sad to say good-bye.” “You were great! You deserve the best!”
- Check-in. Include how the children feel about the fact that this is the last group session. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: CHOOSE YOUR OWN.** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards
- Drawing: Have children draw a picture of how they feel about the group ending.
- Discussion: “How did you feel when you first came to the group? Have these feelings changed over time?”
- Review and evaluate the group in an open group discussion: What did the children learn in the group? What did they like and not like about it? What were their favorite things in the group? [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- Story: “The Children’s Star.” Give the children a “star” souvenir at the end of the story. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- Give the children a Certificate of Completion. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Positive affirmation [See Facilitator Note 7.]: Say something positive to each of the children that can be related to the work they have done in the group. Then we recommend pinning on each child’s shirt an “I am special!” badge. [See Facilitator Note 8.]
- “Pass the Squeeze” game. If possible, each child passes his or her own message around the circle. [See Facilitator Note 9.] Optional messages: “It’s sad to say good-bye.” “I’ll miss you, but I’ll remember you and what we did together.” “Good-bye! We were great! We deserve the best!”
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

▪ Messages

“It’s sad to say good-bye.”

“You were great! You deserve the best!”

▪ Desired Outcomes for the Child

1. To realize that this is the end of the group and to express some related emotions.
2. To acknowledge his or her accomplishments and to feel proud of him- or herself.

▪ **Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought**

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimize these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

The check-in may be an opportunity for group leaders and children to express their feelings about this being the last session of the group. You may want to ask the children directly how they feel about it or model for them by expressing your feelings about separating from them and from the group. Allow the children to express a range of feelings, including relief, about the ending of the group.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (CHOOSE YOUR OWN)

Remind the children of all the feelings that have been discussed in the group. Then ask each child to choose a feeling and then describe a time when they experienced that feeling.

3. THE CHILDREN'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE GROUP

Many of the children's accomplishments are intangible. Furthermore, each child, depending on individual characteristics and history, will have a different list of accomplishments. The children may need your help in identifying their achievements in the group. Commend the children for being brave enough to participate in the group and to deal with painful issues, for being good listeners and friends to other group members, for learning new ideas, and for expressing uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

4. REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE GROUP

The purpose of this activity is to allow the children to express their opinions and feelings about the group and to give group leaders a sense of what the children learned in the group. This is not a formal evaluation of the program; rather, it is an opportunity to empower the children by giving them the message that their opinions and ideas are valid, important, and useful. With older children, you may want to do part of the evaluation in writing to allow children to give anonymous feedback.

5. THE STORY “THE CHILDREN’S STAR” (original idea by Jim Brink)

Once upon a time in a faraway and mountainous country lived many children. Each child lived in a house with his or her family. Because the land was so very steep, it was dangerous for the children to wander or play too far from their homes. For children who had brothers or sisters, it wasn’t so bad. But even so, none of the children ever had a chance to play with children in other houses in this mountainous area. It was very lonely, and sometimes the children didn’t get along with their brothers or sisters so they got into fights. Many of these children also had moms and dads who would get angry with each other. Some children even saw their mom being hit by her partner or by their other parent. It was scary and sad.

One night a beautiful colored light appeared in the windows of all the houses of all the families in the mountains. The children were awakened by this wonderful light. They got out of bed and were very surprised to find that none of their moms and dads were awakened by this light. So the children went outside to see the beautiful light. It was so strong that some children could see other houses and even some of the other children. Forgetting that it was night and how they all had been told never to wander away, the children started walking toward the light.

Now the shimmering light was really a star that had come very close to the mountains, over a valley. Children came from all over the mountains to the valley, drawn and guided by the light. They all played and danced and sang. Each one felt very happy and safe and, most important, not alone. Then, as day began to dawn, the children started back for home. As they were leaving, the star burst into a thousand million little pieces. Each of the children took a piece of the star as they headed home in the early light of dawn.

Each child quietly went back to bed. Some of the children woke up in the morning and thought they had dreamed about playing with the other children under the beautiful light of the star. But then, they all found the pieces of the star they had taken with them and knew that this wasn’t a dream and that they weren’t alone anymore. And every time they looked at the star pieces, they remembered being together with the other children and how happy that was.

Certificate of **COMPLETION**

This award recognizes and
commends

for outstanding performance
in completing

this_____day of _____, 2001

6. CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION (COC)

Multipurpose program certificates of completion (COCs) can be bought in paper-products stores. You also could make a unique COC for your group, either on a computer or by hand. Each COC should include the program's name, the child's name, the date, and the signatures of the group leaders. Another option is to include the number of sessions the child participated in. This can be especially useful if a child has missed many sessions and needs to go through the group again. It is our experience that older children like formal-looking COCs, while younger children relate better to decorative and colorful COCs.

7. POSITIVE AFFIRMATION

After affirming themselves in previous group sessions, in the last session the children can give positive affirmations to each other. Being explicitly valued by their friends is a powerful contribution to children's self-esteem. Use this option with older children and only in groups in which there is minimal risk of the children not finding anything positive to say about their friends.

It is usually safer to ask each child to say "something good" about one other child – for example, the next child in the circle. Tactfully help a child who cannot find any positive affirmation to say regarding the other child's good qualities or talents. Never leave a child unaffirmed. Box 4.27 contains an example.

8. "I AM SPECIAL!" BADGE

The badge can be made in several ways. We use shiny golden cardboard stars sold as Christmas decorations, attach a safety pin to the back of the star, and write "I am special because...!" on the front. Children can fill in the blank on the badge by deciding why they are special.

9. "PASS THE SQUEEZE"

You may need to help the children put together their messages. Tactfully censor messages that conflict with the spirit of the group. For example, we asked a 10-year-old boy who suggested the message "We hate girls!" to find another, more positive and inclusive one.

Box 4.27: An Example of Positive Affirmation Exercise

Group Leader Rachel, what good things can you say about Sharon?

Rachel I like her shoes.

Group Leader Yes, Sharon's shoes are very nice. Can you think about other things, things she is good at, nice qualities she has?

Rachel Well, I don't really know things like that about her. We only know each other here.

Group Leader that's right, but here in the group we got to know several good things about Sharon. It's enough to look at the walls...

Mike She's good at painting!

Rachel Oh, yeah! She is a real good artist, the way she draws all these animals.

Group Leader Now, can you say that to Sharon?

Rachel (turns to Sharon) You are a very good artist. Maybe the second best in the group.

BOOSTER SESSION ONE:
REVIEW OF “ABUSE AND VIOLENCE ARE NOT OKAY”
FROM SESSION 2

Outline for Booster Session One

- Message: “Abuse and violence are not okay.”
- Children’s favorite pictures/collages from the group should be hung in the room before they enter.
- Check-in. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: Choose your own** [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Re-introduce name cards.
- Review of “Abuse and violence are not okay.” [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Review “What Hands Can Do” drawing.
- Group Activity: “Abuse is not okay” poster. [See Facilitator Note 4.]
- Personal Affirmation. [See Facilitator Note 5.]
- “Pass the Squeeze” game. [See Facilitator Note 6.]
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

☐ **Message**

“Abuse and violence are not okay.”

☐ **Desired Outcomes**

1. To review Session 2 message “Abuse and violence are not okay.”
2. To review that abuse is not okay under any circumstances.

☐ **Facilitator Notes**

1. CHECK-IN

The purpose of check-in is to allow children to talk about how they feel and to legitimate these feelings. Check-in also helps children identify and name feelings. Check-in should center on how the children felt during the last week and on the day of the group.

When children identify a feeling, encourage them to say why they are feeling the way they do. It is important to allow each child adequate time and group attention when checking in. At the same time, check-in should not be extended beyond reasonable time

limits or turn into the session's main focus. Make exceptions when children need to share and work on recent traumatic events, such as an eruption of violence at home.

Two different forms of check-in will be used to accommodate the two different age groups. Children ages 5-7 will use the *Weather report* exercise and children ages 8-10 will use the *Direct expression of feelings and thoughts* exercise.

Direct expression of feelings and thoughts. Older children may find it easier to discuss “highs” and “lows” of the previous week.

Weather report. Children choose, from a poster describing several weather conditions, the one that reflects their feeling (e.g., sunny, foggy, cloudy, stormy) and explain to the group why they feel this way.

The check-in may be an opportunity for group leaders and children to express their feelings about the coming end of the group. You may want to ask the children directly how they feel about it or model for them by expressing your feelings about separating from them and from the group. Allow the children to express a range of feelings, including relief, about the ending of the group.

2. FEELING OF THE DAY (CHOOSE YOUR OWN)

Remind the children of all the feelings that have been discussed in the group. Then ask each child to choose a feeling and then describe a time when they experienced that feeling.

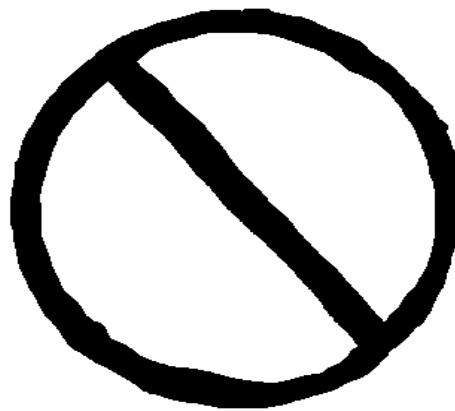
3. DEFINING ABUSE

People in all age groups tend to define a behavior by giving examples of it. We suggest that you include in the discussion of the different kinds of abuse – physical, sexual, and emotional – a general definition of abuse. *Abuse* can be defined as any behavior that physically or emotionally hurts another person and that is not an accident. Also discuss feelings that result from being abused and from abusing, such as fear, guilt, and feeling bad about oneself. Be sure to use age appropriate language in your discussions.

Emotional abuse is often more subtle than physical abuse and harder to identify. It is also a form of abuse that often is normalized and minimized. A definition of *emotional abuse* that can be used with children is “when one person makes another person feel really bad about him- or herself, and not by accident.” Help children understand emotional abuse by giving them examples they can relate to, such as bullying behavior in school or putdowns by siblings. Then discuss how similar behaviors can occur between adults. The term *emotional abuse* can be replaced with *feeling abuse* for younger children.

4. GROUP ACTIVITY “ABUSE IS NOT OKAY” POSTER

Draw a “no entrance” traffic sign on a poster board. Have each child draw a picture of abuse using crayons and markers and then cut it out. Use the pictures to make a collage on the sign. The entire group can work on the project together and the finished poster can be hung in the group room for Booster Session 2.



ABUSE IS NOT OKAY

5. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

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6. PASS THE SQUEEZE GAME

The Pass the Squeeze game is a closure “ritual” that brings the group together and gives the children an opportunity to hear the main message of the group and to express what they have learned that day. The children and the group leaders stand and hold hands in a circle, and a message is passed from one person to the next by saying it and squeezing the hand of the next person in the circle. Then the “squeezed” person says the message and squeezes the hand of his or her other neighbor, and so on around the circle.

You can suggest a message that reflects the main issue dealt with in the session. This activity also can be an opportunity to empower the children by letting them suggest their own message or by helping them construct one that is meaningful and that relates to the group content. It is our experience that even very young children can come up with good messages after a few sessions in which group leaders model the choice of a message.

With preadolescents, this activity may raise a problem when boys and girls do not want to hold each other’s hands. We try to respect the children’s wishes and suggest that the uncomfortable feeling may pass after the children get to know each other better. The activity also can be done either without holding hands or by passing an object from one child to the other while saying the message.

There is a difference between a child’s ability to verbalize the group’s message and his or her emotional internalization and acceptance of it. We found in our study that most children remember the main group messages, such as “It’s okay to talk about abuse,” “Abuse is not okay,” and “The violence is not my fault.” However, variables such as the children’s personalities and developmental state, family situations, and family histories of abuse may influence the children’s readiness to incorporate these statements into their cognitive and emotional makeup.

BOOSTER SESSION TWO:
REVIEW OF SAFETY PROTECTION PLAN
FROM SESSION 8

Outline for Booster Session Two

- Message: “I have the right to be safe.” “We can hold things together, even when we are shaky.”
- Children’s favorite pictures/collages from the group should be hung in the room before they enter.
- Check-in. Include how the children feel about the fact that this is the last group session. [See Facilitator Note 1.]
- **Feeling of the day: Choose your own**
- Re-introduce name cards
- Safety Protection should be reintroduced and reinforced
- Each child should make another safety plan.
- Discussion about the end of the group and affirmation and praise for all the work the children have done.
- Crumpled Paper Exercise. [See Facilitator Note 2.]
- Group photo of children’s hands holding together crumpled paper to be distributed to children to take home. [See Facilitator Note 3.]
- Personal Affirmation [See facilitator Note 4.]
- “Pass the Squeeze” game. If possible, each child passes his or her own message around the circle. [See Facilitator Note 5.] Optional messages: “It’s sad to say good-bye.” “I’ll miss you, but I’ll remember you and what we did together.” “Good-bye! We were great! We deserve the best!”
- Snack should be included in the session.
- A reward/reinforcement should be given to each child at the end of the session.

☐ **Messages**

“I have the right to be safe.”

“We can hold things together, even when we are shaky.”

☐ **Desired Outcomes for the Child**

1. Review of places to go and people to call in dangerous situations and cases of emergency.
2. To realize that this is the last session the group will be together.

❑ Facilitator Notes and Food for Thought

1. CHECK-IN

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2. CRUMPLED PAPER EXERCISE

Have children build a hill by crumpling up pieces of paper. Have them hold it together with their hands despite its shakiness. Emphasize to the children that “We can hold things together, even when we are shaky.”

3. PICTURE OF CHILDREN'S HANDS HOLDING CRUMPLED PAPER

Take a picture using a Polaroid camera that be given to each child to remember the group. Be sure to only include the children's hands in the photo to ensure confidentiality.

4. PERSONAL AFFIRMATION

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